SUBMISSION
OF THE
ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR
TO THE
NDP ENVIRONMENT TASK FORCE

FEBRUARY 9, 1982

BROCK UNIVERSITY

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

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Mr. Chairman:

The Ontario Federation of Labour welcomes this opportunity to appear before the Task Force on the Environment.

The OFL, as the trade union centre in Ontario and the spokesman for 800,000 affiliated trade unionists, is the largest Federation in Canada, and represents over a third of the organized workers in the country. These workers, together with their families, constitute a substantial part of the population of our province. The Federation reflects their aspirationsas working people and has consistently taken the position that any matter which concerns its members as trade unionists, or as citizens of this country, is a matter for its legitimate concern.

In submitting this brief, therefore, the Federation, as the representative of a large segment of the public of Ontario, feels that its views are not narrowly sectional, and that the proposals it has to make here are not solely on behalf of its members, but in the interests of the people of this province as a whole.

About 15 years ago the OFL established a standing committee on the environment and pollution control. In some respects this committee overlaps with our committee on occupational health and safety. And well it should, since workers suffer from dangers from the in-plant environment in addition to that

outside the plant, mill or office. Industry needs fresh water to run plants. Workers need jobs. Polluted water affects us all.

In 1966 we participated in a conference on Water Resources Management where we voiced many of the concerns that have emerged to the forefront in recent years, especially those issues that came on the agenda since Love Canal and also the more recent acid rain disclosures.

Lester R. Brown, a noted world ecologist pointed out in his most recent book, The Sustainable Society that if the biological underpinnings of the global ecology system could not be secured, then economic industrial expansion, higher standard of living and the need for more goods has brought to the fore the importance of our resources. If the future expansion of our economy is to be assured we will have to protect and conserve these natural resources. These include water, air, soil, forest and wildlife and fish.

Ontario was once a healthy province, criss-crossed by sparkling rivers andstreams, covered with beautiful forests and vegetation, with productive farms and well spaced prosperous towns and villages. In the last 75 years we have created unmanageable cities, covered the green land with asphalt and concrete, polluted the rivers and streams, stripped the timber from our forests and destroyed much of the natural beauty of this great province. We have created an environment of concrete,asphalt and wire from which we cannot extricate ourselves. Today our affluent society can be more accurately characterized as our effluent society.

Conservation of our fresh water resources was never as important as it is today. We are quickly turning the Great Lakes into huge septic tanks. A recent report pointed out that only 60% of our domestic and industrial wastes are being treated before they are dumped into the lakes. Lake Erie is so contaminated that an area estimated at about 2,000 square miles of water at its bottom is "dead", in which fish and other organizms cannot live.

It is doubtful if any beach around Lake Erie is fit for swimming. It is quite possible that the other great lakes are also in danger of deteriorating if this rate of pollution continues.

We have ten years left, after which the pollution of the Great Lakes will reach dangerous and irreversible proportions. Some dramatic effort must be made if we are to avoid disaster.

The pollution problem is entirely man made. Cities are dumping raw sewage into the lakes, ships from all parts of the world are dumping raw sewage, engine room wastes and garbage, into our waterways. Industries are polluting the lakes with industrial wastes, and harmful chemicals used in agriculture are seeping their way into our fresh water system.

It is common knowledge to the residents of Toronto that the once fresh, salmon filled Don and Humber Rivers, have long since lost their natural cleanliness, and that few beaches along Lake Ontario within reach of Toronto are fit for bathing. But the matter of water pollution cannot be confined to the Toronto area alone, it involves the whole Great Lakes system. The conservation and recreational regions used by Ontario workers are being threatened with the prospect of extensive water pollution.

The mounting crisis facing the people of Ontario and other areas bordering the Great Lakes with respect to water resources demands the immediate attention of all governments concerned.

The need for mass public outcry and action is long overdue. It is pointed out that the Great Lakes are the world's greatest single reserve of fresh water and that the value of such an expanse of fresh water has enabled the rapid development of the widest forms of industry both in the United States and Canada, starting with the gigantic basic mineral resources industries.

The processing of ores and metals and other materials has all too often been a major contribution to the pollution of our waters.

We are in serious trouble over water pollution, and that years and many millions, even billions of dallars must be spent to correct the situation. It should be noted here that the annual loss to Ontario alone through pollution is now set at several hundred million dollars.

A large responsibility for the neglect of the lakes is due to the fact that there has been no ministry of government charged with the specific duty of guarding our most important natural resource although there are 77 Canadian and International agencies concerned with some aspect of the Great Lakes. The most prominent problems are associated with the substantial volumes and complex types of waste waters. There are pulp and paper mills in Ontario, for example, with industrial waste flows of up to 40 million gallons per day. Other smaller industries produce extremely strong chemical wastes whose pollution equivilant in terms of domestic sewage are many times larger than the municipality in which they operate.

According to a three year study by Donald K. Ross, researcher with the New York Public Interest Group, some of the most deadliest pollutants and hazardous chemicals known to science are dumped into the Niagara River and its environs, daily. Seven hundred industrial plants discharge 500 million gallons of waste into the river. While there is some restrictions on oil and grease, there is none on the spectrum of carcinogenic and otherwise toxic wastes. In addition, 350 million gallons of waste water from sewage plants which also contains some industrial waste, is dumped into the river. There are 200 hazardous land fill sites close to the Niagara River from which contaminants seep into the waterways.

In the case of water pollution from toxic and other wastes, the most economical and effective remedy is at its source.

Much of the pollution of the Niagara River, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario stems from the industrial community waste dumped from the American side of these waterways. Since the anti-environmentalist administration of Ronald Reagan, our efforts to clean up the Niagara River and the inflow to Canadian waters is going to be an uphill battle. Nevertheless, if our efforts are to be credible we must clean up our own backyard.

We would be more effective if when we demand a cleanup of the Niagara River by the Americans, if our authorities made some effort to reduce considerably the Canadian and particularly Ontario's contribution to the acid rain problem -- Inco emissions and those of coal fired stations of Ontario Hydro.

Since the Love Canal discoveries of three years ago certain methods, criteria , and management of wastes have been given much acceptance.

These are:

1) Waste must be reduced by designing industrial processes so that hazardous by-products are not produced.

2) Hazardous products should not be allowed on the market for a production process till they are proven safe.

3) Waste material should be recycled before disposal, useful substances saved and sold for other uses and profit. This would also save on landfill disposal.

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4) Treatment on site to render substances less toxic and less hazardous.

5) Incineration at source of productive process or nearby.

6) Solidification and encapsulation before disposing in landfill sites.

7) Landfill sites must have full environmental assessment for flood, seepage, stability of terrain etc.

8) Extracting of products from waste can be economical profit-wise and may defray the cost of the safeguard.

We will not go into the various methods and ways waste can be made harmless. The expertise is available, the technology is available. All we need is the will to do it. An aware public must pressure the politicians to act. Politicians only respond to numbers translated into votes.

Our problem is that the most effective way to collect data on the presence of harmful substances in the water is to test their presence in fish. Fish have a geographical location, their age and therefore their consumption of harmful substances can be gauged, they are part of the food chain that ends with us in most cases.

The public decides that since they are not fishermen or they don't eat fish then they are not affected. Therefore, they don't get involved. The truth is that the harm is greater than what effect the pollution has on fish alone. There is a real danger that between the acid rain and the wastes from dumping that most of the Great Lakes will die. The self-purification system will be harmed beyond recall.

On the U.S. side at Niagara River there are 89 industrial facilities licenced by New York State to dump effluents into the Niagara River or its tributaries. There are 12 municipal waterwaste treatment facilities that also dump their wastes into these waterways. In turn, several hundred plants dump into the 12 municipal waterwaste treatment units. There are some 215 chemical waste dumps in the Niagara area. Some of them equalling the potential of the Hooker plant for leakages into the river.

It is estimated that the leakage and the effluent flow is 6 times as great from the American side to that from ours.

Since the flow to Lake Ontario is the greatest from this source we have a concern far wider than the confines of this community.

Evidence is that fish, clams, and herring gulls in different areas of Lake Ontario have a high concentration of mirex, mercury, PCB's and dioxin. The fact that certain areas are banned from commercial or sports fsh, despite the protest of the tourist industry, is an indication how harmful these contaminants are.

The response of the authorities is too often procrastination, passing the buck, or outright inaction. Calling for more research or for "continuing monitoring program" by the Canada-Ontario Review Board or by recycling of ministers responsible, is just not good enough.

Recommendations

1. There has to be a comprehensive waste management strategy for directing toxic substance activities of the Great Lakes Basin. Through the International Joint Commission (IJC) a coordinate assessment processes to design plans of action and control measures must be established. This is a responsibility of both the Canadian and U.S. governments.

2. Phosphorous discharge from the major municipal treatment plants around Lake Erie and Lake Ontario must be reduced considerably.

3. The 62% cut in U.S. federal grants for Great Lakes research has to be reversed if the research is to continue for improving the water quality for the 37 million people living in the Great Lakes basin.

4. That CMT (caroxymethyltartronate) a detergent builder be discontinued till its effects on the ecology and human health be fully evaluated.

5. The IJC must demand that the governments of Canada and USA amend the Canada/US Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to incorporate objectives it has provided for PCP's, dioxins, phosphorous, lead, chlorine, cyanide and selenium.

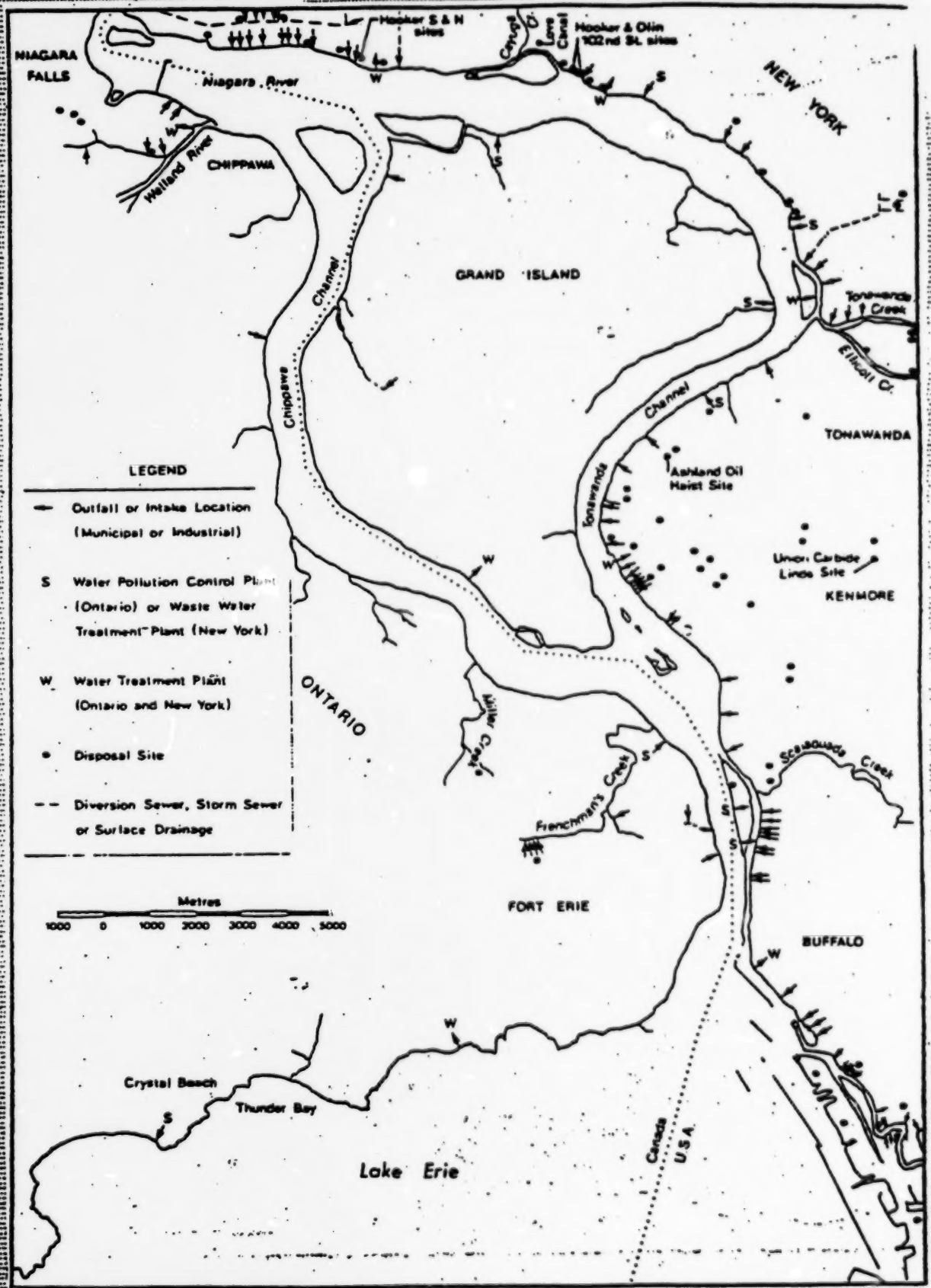

FIGURE 1. INTAKES, OUTFALLS AND DISPOSAL SITES IN THE UPPER NIAGARA RIVER (Source: Niagara River Toxics Control Committee, 1981)

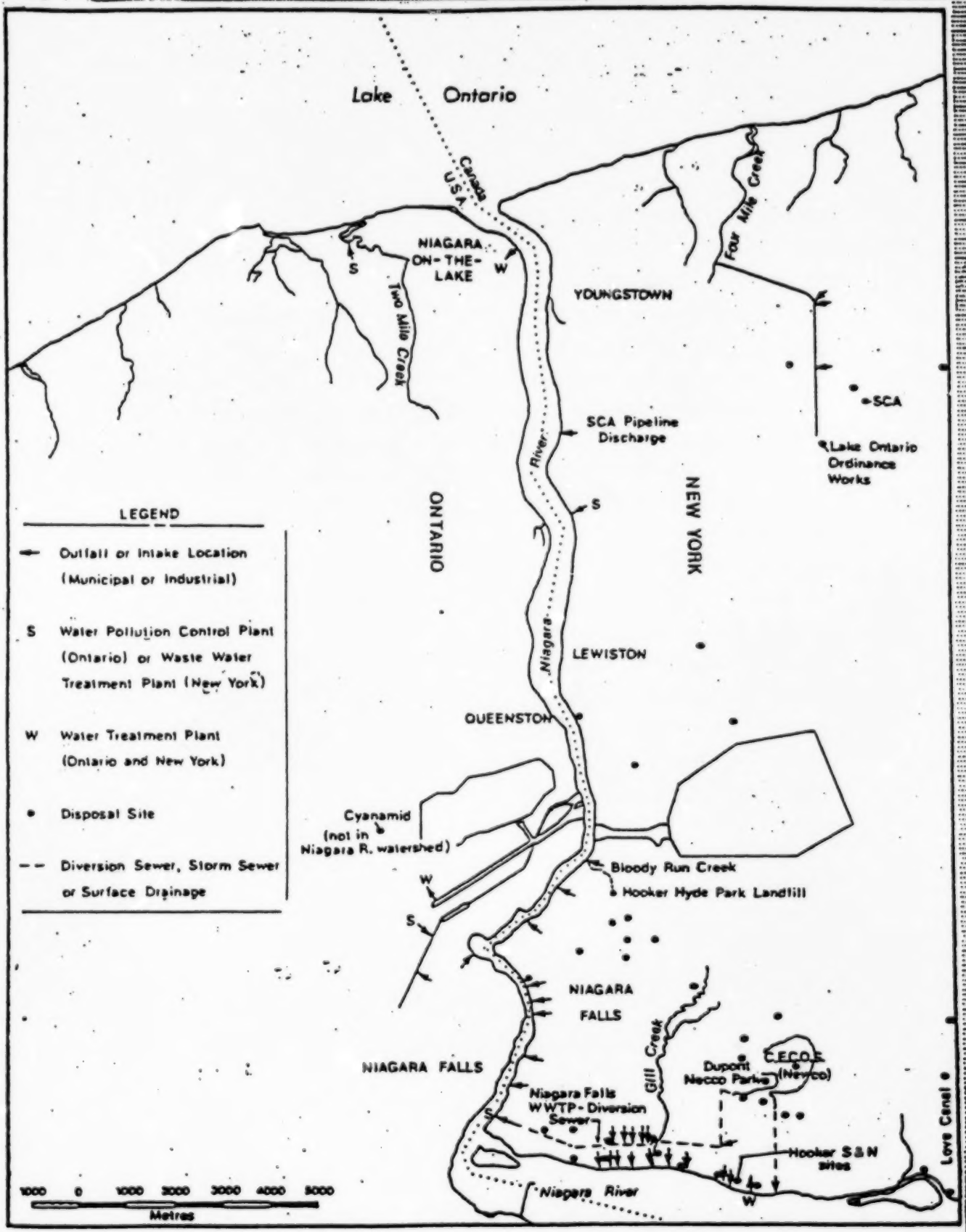

FIGURE 2. INTAKES, OUTFALLS AND DISPOSAL SITES IN THE LOWER NIAGARA RIVER (Source: Niagara River Toxics Control Committee, 1981)

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